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SUBJECT: KENYA: FORWARD THINKING TO NEGATE "DEFAMATION OF RELIGION"
IN THE UN

REF: STATE 128320

¶1. (U) Summary: This message is a response to an action request in Ref A, and provides post input for Kenya to the Secretary's "Defamation of Religion" working group. Although Kenya has strong domestic incentives to oppose "defamation of religions" resolutions, the influence of African Union, G-77, and to a lesser degree the Organization of the Islamic Conference have resulted in a history of abstentions. Post will continue to engage with favorable contacts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and engagement with religious lobbies may be useful to encourage the GOK to support the Action Plan to Combat Racial and Religious Discrimination and Intolerance. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Kenya has historically abstained on "defamation of religion" resolutions in the Third Committee and General Assembly, and looks to the African Union (AU), G-77, and to a lesser degree the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to inform its position on multilateral issues. Kenya's Muslim community is small (about eight to ten percent of the population), but is outspoken and economically influential. Trade linkages with OIC states such as the UAE, Qatar, Libya and Malaysia result in GOK deference on matters sensitive to the OIC.

¶3. (SBU) Bilateral ties between the United States and GOK are strong, but post's diplomatic and public pressure on the GOK to speed up implementation of the reform agenda (including the recent announcement of a 212f visa ban on the Attorney General) has prompted a retaliatory go-slow approach by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on some issues. While foreign Minister Moses Wetangula and Permanent Secretary Thuita Mwangi are problematic, helpful interlocutors include Deputy Foreign Minister Richard Onyanka, Director for Political Affairs Ben Ogutu, and Deputy Chief of Protocol David Musyoka. Working quietly with friendly contacts in the MFA could be useful.

¶4. (SBU) Post believes that a policy of engaging domestic religious constituencies-particularly mainstream Christian and moderate Muslim organizations-could prompt domestic voices to speak out against "defamation of religions" resolutions. Christian organizations such as the National Council of Churches-Kenya are deeply concerned about the spread of Islamic extremism, and are frequently engage the government on the subject of religious freedoms. Moderate Muslim organizations such as the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) are also under pressure as they seek to limit the spread of extremist ideology among the youth. Winning their support will be a harder sell than among Christian interest groups, but might be in reach if we focus on a positive agenda such as the Action Plan to Combat Racial and Religious Discrimination and Intolerance.

15. (SBU) Directly engaging religious organizations entails a number of risks, however, which should be carefully considered. Religious organizations are accustomed to issuing press statements as a primary advocacy approach to the government. These press statements are at times poorly conceived and risks fuelling inter-religious tension. Any engagement by the United States must emphasize that the purpose of opposing "defamation of religions" motions is to guarantee freedom of religion for followers of all faiths, and that Christian groups in particular should not single out Islam when engaging the public or GOK on the issue. No matter how carefully the United States calibrates its message to religious groups, we run the risk of negative press coverage and potentially stoking already-high religious tensions.

RANNEBERGER